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Reserve



National School Lunch Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE / FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE / WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250
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The National School Lunch Program's purpose, as declared by Congress, is to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children. To this end, it contributes to the physical and mental development of participating children by serving them nutritious, low cost lunches. The program also promotes, in conjunction with nutrition education, the development of good eating habits, so that participating children will learn the relationship between proper eating and good health.

HOW DOES THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM OPERATE?

USDA administers the program at the Federal level. In most States, the State educational agency operates the program through agreements with local schools or school districts. Where States do not administer the program, Food and Nutrition Service Regional Offices do.

The program offers Federal financial assistance for each lunch served; technical assistance and guidance to establish and operate the program; USDA-donated foods or cash; and additional financial assistance for each lunch served free or at a reduced price to eligible children. By law, the Department adjusts the rates of reimbursement for paid, free, and reduced-price lunches semiannually in accordance with changes in the Consumer Price Index.

WHAT SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS CAN PARTICIPATE?

Any public or nonprofit private school of high school grade or under is eligible. Also eligible are public and licensed, nonprofit, private residential child care institutions such as orphanages, homes for retarded children, and temporary shelters for runaway children. Schools and institutions wishing to take part in the program must agree to provide lunches that meet the program's meal standards and to provide free and reduced-price lunches to eligible children.

CAN ALL CHILDREN RECEIVE LUNCH WHEN THEIR SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION PARTICIPATES IN THE PROGRAM?

Yes. In addition, a school or institution cannot segregate a child from others; provide him or her with a different lunch; or serve him or her from a different line or at a different time because of his or her inability to pay. If you believe that a school or institution in the program is treating a child unfairly, you should send a detailed letter to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

WHICH CHILDREN ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS?

By law, all children of families meeting eligibility standards based on family size and income can receive benefits if their school participates in the program. This determination is made by an official at each school who also takes into consideration such hardship conditions as high shelter, medical, and special education expenses and disaster or casualty losses. To reach as many needy children as possible, participating schools and institutions send information to parents and the news media each year to explain how families can apply for free and reduced-price lunches. School principals, teachers, or institution officials can also provide this information upon request.

WHAT REQUIREMENTS MUST MEALS MEET?

For participating schools to be reimbursed for meals served through the program, lunches must meet minimum U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern requirements. These specify that each lunch consist of specific amounts of lean meat or meat alternate (poultry, fish, cheese, cooked dry beans or peas, eggs, or peanut butter); two or more vegetables and/or fruits; whole-grain or enriched bread or bread alternate; and fluid milk served as a beverage. This pattern is designed to provide about one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA's) for key nutrients established by the Food and Nutrition Board, National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences. This pattern also encourages serving a wide variety of conventional foods including whole-grain breads and fresh fruits and vegetables.

However, meals must not only be nutritionally adequate, but should also be prepared and served in an attractive manner. Therefore, the USDA periodically reviews and may change the program meal requirements to take into account new information about eating patterns, food preferences, and nutritional needs of children.

HOW DO SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS JOIN THE PROGRAM?

Interested schools and institutions should apply directly to the State or Federal office administering the program in their own State. To obtain the name and address of the appropriate office, write to the School Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS
HIGHLIGHTED EDITION

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The National School Lunch Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is available to children regardless of race, color, or national origin.

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM
U.S.D.A.